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P 311309Z DEC 90
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
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INFO RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
USIA WASHDC 4324
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS PN
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Dept. of State, RPS/IPS, Margaret P. Grafeld, Dir.
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Date 2/27/02 Exemption 1.5d

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USCINCSO FOR POLAD
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() Classify as (X) Extend as () Downgrade to Conf.
Date 2/27/02 Declassify on 12/31/15 Reason 1.5d
X6

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ELAB, ECON, KJUS, CS
SUBJECT: MONTHLY POLITICAL SUMMARY: DECEMBER

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1. ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ - ENTIRE TEXT.

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3. OVERVIEW: A SHORT BUT SHAKY MONTH

ECONOMIC WOES AND THE PUNTARENAS SUMMIT HELD CENTER
STAGE PRIOR TO COSTA RICA'S SHUTDOWN FOR THE
CHRISTMAS/NEW YEAR'S HOLIDAYS. OPPOSITION ON THE

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PART OF SOME PLN DEPUTIES, WHO OFFERED 296 AMENDMENTS
TO BLOCK THE PROJECT, LED THE GOVERNMENT TO BREAK THE
TAX PACKAGE IN TWO, FINALLY OBTAINING PRELIMINARY
APPROVAL OF THE THIRTEEN PERCENT SALES TAX ON
DECEMBER 22. THE CONGRESS THEN ADJOURNED UNTIL
JANUARY 7, WHEN IT WILL TAKE UP FINAL APPROVAL OF THE
SALES TAX AND BEGIN EXAMINING THE REMAINING TAX
PACKAGE ITEMS.

IN CONJUNCTION WITH SPLITTING THE TAX PACKAGE, THE
GOCR INTRODUCED A SERIES OF ECONOMIC MEASURES TO
REDUCE LIQUIDITY, RAISE REVENUE AND INCREASE THE COST
OF IMPORTS. ALL THESE ACTIONS MET WITH THE APPROVAL
OF THE IMF, WHICH MOVED CLOSER TO REACHING AN ACCORD
WITH THE GOCR ON DISBURSING FUNDS. MEANWHILE, A 5.7
(RICHTER SCALE) EARTHQUAKE ON DECEMBER 23 REMINDED
COSTA RICANS THAT THE WHOLE COUNTRY, NOT JUST THE
ECONOMY, IS ON SHAKY GROUNDS. THE GOCR PROMISED TO
GIVE PRIORITY TO REBUILDING THE ROUGHLY 1000 HOUSES
DESTROYED BY THE QUAKE, THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT COULD
ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTIES IN ACCOMPLISHING THIS TASK
GIVEN ITS FISCAL CRISIS.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CONTINUED TO WEIGH ON CALDERON'S
POPULARITY, WITH A POLL FINDING HIS LABORS
DISAPPROVED OF BY A 33-31 PERCENT MARGIN. CALDERON
PUBLICLY TOOK THIS IN STRIDE, TELLING THE PRESS THAT,
GIVEN THE SERIOUS MEASURES BEING INSTITUTED, HIS
RATING WAS QUITE STRONG. PLN POLITICIANS SAW THE
POLL AS FURTHER CONFIRMATION THAT THEY CAN'T LOSE IN
1994. THE CURRENT LEADER IN THE LIBERATION

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PRESIDENTIAL SWEEPSTAKES, JOSE MARIA FIGUERES,
RETURNED TO SAN JOSE FROM THE KENNEDY SCHOOL FOR THE
HOLIDAYS.

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THE PUNTARENAS SUMMIT MONOPOLIZED FOREIGN POLICY
ATTENTION, WITH THE SMALL MFA ALMOST OVERWHELMED BY
THE EVENT. THE SUMMIT PRODUCED A STRONG CONDEMNATION
OF THE FMLN AND PRAISE FOR THE EAI/PDD INITIATIVES.
THE PRESIDENTS PROMISED TO FOLLOW UP ON THESE ITEMS
IN THE MONTHS TO COME, PUSHING FOR A CEASEFIRE IN EL
SALVADOR AND THE CONCRETIZATION OF THE ECONOMIC
INITIATIVES.

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
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4. THE JOHN HULL WATCH

THE HUNT FOR JOHN HULL BECAME A HOT PRESS THEME IN DECEMBER, AS NEWSPAPERS SALIVATED OVER THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE FUGITIVE RANCHER MIGHT BE RETURNED TO COSTA RICA TO STAND TRIAL FOR THE LA PENCA BOMBING. HULL WAS FIRST REPORTED IN JUIGALPA, NICARAGUA, LATER SAID TO HAVE DISAPPEARED TO SAN SALVADOR, AND THEN REPORTED BACK IN NICARAGUA. FINALLY, ON DECEMBER 26, LEADING DAILY LA NACION REPORTED LOCATING HIM IN ORLANDO, FLORIDA. HULL'S RAPID MOVEMENTS WERE IN RESPONSE TO THREATS BY COSTA RICAN AUTHORITIES TO REQUEST HIS DETENTION IN NICARAGUA, PENDING EXTRADITION. PRIOR TO FLEEING, HULL TOLD THE TICO TIMES THAT, "THE COSTA RICAN GOVERNMENT UNDER (EX-PRESIDENT) MONGE APPROVED, THEIR COLONELS WERE AT MY HOUSE...NOTHING WAS DONE WITHOUT THE APPROVAL OF THE COSTA RICAN GOVERNMENT." LAUGHING, HULL CONTINUED THAT, "WHEN I WAS IN JAIL, MONGE SENT ME A MESSAGE THAT HE WAS WITH ME MORALLY AND SPIRITUALLY. I WOULD HAVE LIKED HIM TO BE WITH ME PHYSICALLY."

5. NO PEACE FOR UPAZ

THE UN-CHARTERED UNIVERSITY FOR PEACE (UPAZ) CELEBRATED ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY DECEMBER 12. UPAZ

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OFFICIALS PLANNED TO READ AN "HONOR ROLL" OF NAMES OF THOSE WHO HELPED FOUND THE UNIVERSITY. AMONG THOSE ON THE LIST WAS KURT WALDHEIM. DEMONSTRATORS GATHERED OUTSIDE THE CEREMONY, HOWEVER, PROTESTING THE INCLUSION OF "WAR CRIMINAL" WALDHEIM'S NAME. REALIZING THEIR GAFFE, UPAZ OFFICIALS OMITTED WALDHEIM'S NAME WHEN THE LIST WAS READ.

DESPITE THIS BROUHAHA, AND MISGIVINGS ON THE PART OF SOME COSTA RICAN OFFICIALS WHO SEE UPAZ AS LESS A SCHOOL THAN A HANGOUT FOR REGIONAL LEFTISTS, PRESIDENT CALDERON GAVE THE EVENT'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS. FOLLOWING HIS SPEECH, HOWEVER, THE PRESIDENT AND OTHERS RUSHED OUT OF THE CEREMONY WHEN A SUSPICIOUS BRIEFCASE WAS SPOTTED. POLICE DOGS INDICATED THE VALISE CONTAINED A BOMB, AND AN OFFICER SHOT THE LOCK OFF THE QUESTIONABLE BRIEFCASE. ONLY PAPERS WERE FOUND,

LATER CLAIMED BY A NICARAGUAN STUDENT. ALL IN ALL, A
TOUGH DAY FOR NEW UPAZ RECTOR JAIME MONTALVO CORREA.

6. THE SUMO SAUDI BRIGADE

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A NICARAGUAN SUMO INDIAN LEADER MET WITH US DECEMBER
13 TO OFFER THE SERVICES OF FIFTEEN FORMER CONTRAS
(ALL SUMOS) FOR THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SADDAM HUSSEIN.
THE SUMOS ASKED FOR ARMS AND TRANSPORTATION TO SAUDI
ARABIA, WHERE THEY INTENDED TO STAND ALONGSIDE ALLIED
FORCES IN THE DESERT. APPARENTLY, THE FIFTEEN JUDGE

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LIFE SO DIFFICULT IN NICARGUA, AND CHANCES FOR
ADVANCEMENT SO POOR IN COSTA RICA (THEY WORK IN
CONSTRUCTION AND PICKING COFFEE), THAT THEY ARE
WILLING TO GO TO THE OTHER END OF THE WORLD IN THE
HOPES OF EVENTUALLY BEING REWARDED. WE POLITELY
DECLINED THE OFFER.

7. ONUCA STATUS

COL. LALIT TEWVARI, AN INDIAN ARMY OFFICER, TOOK THE
REINS OF THE LOCAL ONUCA BRANCH ON DECEMBER 3.
TEWVARI, IN A DECEMBER 19 COURTESY CALL ON THE
CHARGE, RELATED THAT THE MILITARY SIDE OF ONUCA COSTA

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RICA HAS BEEN CUT BY MORE THAN HALF, FROM 21 TO 10
SOLDIERS (THERE ALSO REMAIN ABOUT ONE DOZEN CIVILIAN
SUPPORT PERSONNEL). TEWVARI SAID THAT THIS WAS HIS
FIRST UN ASSIGNMENT AND DESCRIBED COSTA RICA AS
PARADISE [] THE COLONEL SAID THAT
HIS MISSION -- ONE HE RECOGNIZES IS NOT TOO DIFFICULT
GIVEN CONDITIONS IN COSTA RICA -- IS TO SHOW THE UN
FLAG AND MAKE MORE DIFFICULT ANY USE OF COSTA RICAN
TERRITORY BY IRREGULAR FORCES OR THOSE SEEKING TO
SMUGGLE ARMS. HE STATED THAT HE DOES NOT HAVE THE
MANPOWER TO PREVENT SUCH ACTIVITY, ONLY TO DETER AND
INVESTIGATE IT, AND ADDED THAT, GIVEN THE "VIRGIN
FORESTS" COVERING NORTHERN COSTA RICA, "NOT EVEN THE
WHOLE INDIAN ARMY COULD SUCCESSFULLY PATROL IT."

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8. PLN: HAIL (AND STONE) THE RETURNING HERO

AS NOTED ABOVE, JOSE MARIA FIGUERES RETURNED TO SAN
JOSE FROM THE KENNEDY SCHOOL FOR THE HOLIDAYS.
FIGUERES WILL STAY UNTIL JANUARY 12, ENGAGING IN
CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES THE FIRST PART OF JANUARY. HE
WAS WELCOMED BY FULL PAGE ADS PLACED BY HIS CAMPAIGN
TEAM REPRINTING THE RECENT CID POLL SHOWING HIM
LEADING THE LIBERATION PRECANDIDATE PACK. THE ADS
ALSO REITERATED A FIGUERES CAMPAIGN THEME, SAYING
JOSE MARIA "UNITES" COSTA RICANS.

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NOT EVERYONE IN THE PLN FIELD, HOWEVER, IS WILLING TO
BE QUIETLY "UNITED" BY JOSE MARIA. THAT HE MAY HAVE

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KILLED A MAN IN 1973 IS BEING COVERTLY SPREAD BY
OPPONENTS AND SIGNS READING "FIGUERES ASSASSIN" ARE
SAID TO BE UP IN A FEW TOWNS (WE HAVE NOT SEEN ANY
YET). PRECANDIDATE CHALLENGER CORRALES SPECULATED TO
US EARLIER IN THE MONTH THAT JOSE MARIA'S PLAN WAS TO
WRAP UP THE NOMINATION BY THE MIDDLE OF 1991, IN
ORDER TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF DAMAGING STORIES.
POSSIBLY TO SHORT CIRCUIT THAT SCENARIO, HIS
OPPONENTS HAVE CHOSEN TO ATTACK. POLITICAL
DIRECTORATE MEMBER ALFONSO CARRO (TIED TO
PRECANDIDATE ARAYA) SAYS THAT THE PARTY MAY LAUNCH AN
OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE RUMORS "TO CLEAR THE
AIR."

9. CHANGES IN THE SUPREME COURT

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTED FOUR NEW JUDGES IN
DECEMBER TO REPLACE RETIRING MAGISTRATES. RODRIGO
CASTRO MONGE, WHO WAS DIRECTOR OF THE JUDICIAL POLICE
(OIJ), AND ALFONSO CHAVES WERE ELECTED TO REPLACE
DORA GUSZMAN AND JOSE GAMBOA ON THE COURT'S PENAL
CHAMBER. EDUARDO SANCHO WAS NAMED TO REPLACE JUAN
LUIS ARIAS IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL CHAMBER (THE
CONTROVERSIAL SALA IV) AND JORGE ROJAS REPLACED
RETIRING COURT PRESIDENT MIGUEL BLANCO IN THE CIVIL
CHAMBER.

DR. EDGAR CERVANTES VILLALTA, WHO SERVES IN THE LABOR
CHAMBER AND WAS THE COURT'S VICE PRESIDENT, WAS

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ELECTED TO COMPLETE BLANCO'S TERM (ENDING MAY 1991)
AS PRESIDENT OF THE COURT. CERVANTES HAS SERVED ON
THE COURT FOR APPROXIMATELY 20 YEARS. HE IS CHAIRMAN
OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE
ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE AND PRESIDENT OF THE
JUDICIAL SCHOOL COUNCIL.

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10. LABOR MOBILITY UPDATE

THE GOCR ANNOUNCED IN DECEMBER THAT 697 STATE
RAILROAD EMPLOYEES AND 2200 SCHOOL COOKS WILL BE

DISMISSED IN EARLY JANUARY. WITH THESE FIRINGS, THE
GOGR ESTIMATES THAT THE PUBLIC SECTOR WILL HAVE BEEN

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
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INFO RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
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REDUCED BY 4700 PEOPLE, INCLUDING UNREPLACED RETIREES
AND VOLUNTARY RESIGNATIONS. ON DECEMBER 11, CALDERON

TOLD THE PRESS THAT HE HOPED TO AVOID FURTHER FORCED LAYOFFS, EXPLAINING THAT THE REMAINING 2300 SLOTS PROBABLY COULD BE CUT THROUGH ATTRITION AND VOLUNTARY RESIGNATIONS. THE GOVERNMENT, NONETHELESS, CONTINUES TO QUIETLY STUDY THE POSSIBILITY THAT SOME DISMISSALS MAY BE NECESSARY.

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LABOR OPPOSITION TO THE PLAN AND THE REST OF THE GOCR ECONOMIC PROGRAM CONTINUES, HOWEVER, WITH THE UMBRELLA CPT LABOR FEDERATION THREATENING A JANUARY GENERAL STRIKE. TO FURTHER COMPLICATE MATTERS, THE SUPREME COURT'S CONSTITUTIONAL CHAMBER (SALA IV) ISSUED A RULING MAKING MORE DIFFICULT THE EMPLOYMENT OF ESF FUNDS IN THE LABOR PLAN. THE COURT RULED THAT THE USE OF ALL CREDITS AND GRANTS TO THE GOCR MUST BE APPROVED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, WHERE SOME PLN DEPUTIES REMAIN ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO THE LABOR MOBILITY PLAN. FINAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RULING ARE UNCLEAR, THOUGH WE ARE TOLD BY THE GOCR THAT IT IS A MANAGEABLE ISSUE.

11. OUTLOOK AND UPCOMING EVENTS

PRESIDENT CALDERON, ALONG WITH HIS ISTHMUS COUNTERPARTS, WILL MEET WITH MEXICAN LEADER SALINAS JANUARY 10-11. THE PRESIDENTS WILL DISCUSS A FREE TRADE ZONE, OIL AND EL SALVADOR. STAFF LEVEL

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PREPARATIONS IN MEXICO BEGIN JANUARY 4. PRESIDENT CALDERON ALSO PLANS TO ATTEND THE INAUGURATION OF GUATEMALA'S NEW PRESIDENT. CONGRESS WILL RETURN AND GIVE ITS FINAL NOD TO THE SALES TAX INCREASE AND BEGIN FOCUSING ON THE REMAINING PORTION OF THE SPLIT TAX PACKAGE. THE PLN PLANS TO HOLD AN ASSEMBLY TO DEFINE ITS POSITION TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT. THE PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL RACE MAY HEAT UP, WITH POTSHOTS AT JOSE MARIA FIGUERES POSSIBLY INCREASING.

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